



PRESS RELEASE
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By Sgt. Balinda O'Neal

Alaska Guardsman commissions after year-long deployment to Afghanistan

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — An Alaska Army National Guard member who returned from a year-long deployment to Afghanistan in May, commissioned a mere three months later.

After 13 years of military service, the "sirs" and salutes are still catching 2nd Lt. Lane Smith, a platoon leader with the 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, by surprise.

"I enlisted in the Oregon Army National Guard Sept. 13, 2001, but was finishing up my paperwork in the recruiting office when the towers came down," Smith said. Like so many Americans, Smith joined the patriotic calling of a Post-9/11 America.

After 10 years and two deployments as an infantryman and cavalry scout with the ORARNG, Smith found himself teaching in the Alaska village of Tatitlek and assigned to the AKARNG's A Troop, 1-297th Cavalry Reconnaissance and Surveillance Squadron, prior to his Afghanistan deployment.

Smith, as a sergeant first class, deployed to Camp Eggers, Kabul, as a U.S. liaison in support of the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Forces July 2013. In Afghanistan, Smith served as the Mongolians' direct link to the U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and the Base Support Group at Camp Eggers and other sites in country.

"When I return from a deployment I tend to do everything opposite from what the reintegration people tell you to do," explained Smith. "I find it helpful to use the momentum and high energy that goes on overseas to benefit my life back home."

Smith started graduate school five days after returning from his second deployment to Iraq. This go around he returned in time to watch his daughter graduate from high school, bought a house, started a new job and then left for Officers Candidate School in South Dakota 14 days later.

To make all this possible, Smith started planning for OCS while in Afghanistan in February.

"The distance made getting some documents together more difficult but I had a lot of support from people back home," Smith said. "It also took a lot of perseverance to keep on top of things that did not relate to the current mission."

Because of the deployment, the AKNG was able to wave pre-OCS training, and Smith took it upon himself to prepare physically.

"While overseas I ran 15 half marathons and many other smaller races," Smith said. "This greatly aided me when I got to school since I had to keep up with the younger candidates."

Smith had considered commissioning for several years and even completed time in the Reserve Officers Training Corps in college, but didn't give it serious consideration until his latest deployment.

"While on the MAF mission I had the opportunity to do a lot more tasks that were outside of my normal role as a platoon sergeant back in Alaska," Smith explained. "I was exposed to much more of the planning and logistics side of the Army. This also brought me in contact with many excellent officers that mentored me in this whole new side of the Army."

None more so than fellow U.S. liaison Maj. Matthew Wilson, with AKARNG's Joint Forces Headquarters, who served as Smith's partner while on the Afghanistan deployment. Wilson was able to mentor Smith with his years of experience in the logistics field and give him the inspiration needed to take the final plunge.

"I cannot count how many times we were tasked with something that looked impossible to do and Sgt. 1st Class Smith would constantly search outside the box to find a way to make it happen," Wilson explained. "This type of out of the box thinking led to making friendships and fostering team work between Americans and Mongolians."

While on deployment, Smith took charge of English classes for the Mongolians, recruited members of other armies to help with acquiring the necessary assets to conduct training and mission requirements, and oversaw a lot of changes to the mission that resulted from the draw down of forces, all while taking care of logistical needs that the MAF forces might have so that they could focus on base defense issues.

In his 23 years of service, Wilson has never spoken so highly of a non-commissioned officer before and after seeing what Smith was capable of, he advised him to serve in the officer ranks.

"I believe that having been an NCO will help me in understanding the dynamics of the platoon more than officers who had never been enlisted," Smith said. "Just having been that 'Joe' who has now seen every position in a platoon and had many different platoon leaders' styles give me a huge step up."

Smith attributes his wife to making the five-plus years away from home during his 13 years of service possible.

"Schools, deployments, annual training, Katrina, firefighting, I could not have done it without knowing my wife was more than capable of holding down the fort at home," Smith said. "She has always been supportive of my adventure in the National Guard."

Smith is looking forward to a new chapter in his military career that will allow him to push himself and experience a new side of military life.

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Cutlines:

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Maj. Matthew Wilson, with AKARNG's Joint Forces Headquarters, pins the rank of 2nd Lieutenant on to newly commissioned officer, Lane Smith, during a ceremony held at the Alaska National Guard Armory on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in August. The two

Soldiers deployed together for one year to Afghanistan and returned to the United States in May. (U.S. Army Guard photo by Sgt. Edward Eagerton)

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Then, Sgt. 1st Class Lane Smith, left, with the Alaska Army National Guard's A Troop, 1-297th Cavalry Reconnaissance and Surveillance Squadron, and Maj. Matthew Wilson, with AKARNG's Joint Forces Headquarters, stand together in Afghanistan where they were deployed together from July 2013 to May 2014 as U.S. liaisons in support of the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Forces in Afghanistan. (Photo courtesy Maj. Matthew Wilson, Alaska Army National Guard)

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Maj. Matthew Wilson, left, with Alaska Army National Guard's Joint Forces Headquarters, poses for a photo with newly commissioned 2nd Lt. Lane Smith, Alaska Army National Guard, during a ceremony at the Alaska National Guard Armory on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in August. The Guardsmen were deployed together from July 2013 to May 2014 as U.S. liaisons in support of the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Forces in Afghanistan. (Photo courtesy Maj. Matthew Wilson, Alaska Army National Guard)